

# Community Risk Assessment

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**June 2022**  
**Chief Tom Hubbard**

*AFD Mission: To prevent harm to the public, and to protect property and the environment through fire suppression, fire prevention and emergency medical services 24-hours a day.*

# Table of Contents

<b>Risk Assessment- Overview .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Community- Demographics and Profile .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Community- Fire Department Profile .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Risk- Assessment of Data .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Reduction- Smoke Alarm Program.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Reduction- Fire Extinguisher Training .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Reduction- “File of Life” Magnets .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Reduction- High School CPR/ First Aid .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Reduction- Fall Prevention .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Reduction- Fire Safety Inspections.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Reduction- Public Education .....</b>	<b>16</b>

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*This report was prepared and published by: Fire Service Specialist Monica Myers*



# RISK ASSESSMENT- OVERVIEW

This Community Risk Assessment (CRA) for the Aberdeen Fire Department evaluates the risk to the community from incidents which are within the general duties and day-to-day responses of the Fire Department.

As the Fire Department is responsible for both fire suppression/ prevention within the city, and also provides all the emergency medical services to our residents, this report is designed to conduct a risk assessment of only those hazards which are within the purview of the Fire Department. Using community information and evaluating relevant data, this assessment can be then used by the Fire Department to create and implement risk reduction strategies designed support the Mission of the Aberdeen Fire Department- specifically:



*To **prevent harm** to the public, and to **protect property** and the environment through fire suppression, **fire prevention and emergency medical services** 24-hours a day. [emphasis added]*

This Community Risk Assessment report is intended to outline the following:

1. **COMMUNITY:** This section includes general information about the city as well as the current capacity of the fire department related to staffing, operations and equipment;
2. **RISK:** This section provides an overview of the most prominent risks and fire/ emergency medical incidents which have been data-identified within the City for which the Fire Department responds or provides service to residents;
3. **REDUCTION:** As the most critical portion of “Community Risk Reduction” (CRR), this section identifies some strategies which have already been implemented by the Aberdeen Fire Department designed to reduce some of the identified risks to our community, as well as opportunities for programs in the future.



This report uses data from multiple sources including demographics from the U.S. Census Bureau, Fire Department staffing/ operations and actual Fire and EMS incident reports to assess basic levels of risk to the community. This report is intended to provide a greater understanding of the risks facing persons within Aberdeen, to include those whom live in the city, as well of those who work here, attend school or may just be passing through on the major highways which bisect the City.

This risk assessment is considered to be a working document which should undergo review, revisions and additions over time. The Community Risk Assessment is not meant to identify and examine every risk in the community, especially when contributing factors are outside of the control or responsibility of the Fire Department; the overarching intent of this Assessment is to drive discussion on risk mitigation strategies for Aberdeen after making data-driven and research-based decisions on how to best address these risks with the resources available.

Empowered with this data, this document serves as a starting point for Community Risk Reduction planning and implementation, some of which has already been initiated due to the Fire Services Specialist position within the Aberdeen Fire Department created in August 2020; Community Risk Reduction is the function of all members of the Fire Department, working in conjunction with our other community partners and organizations.

The support from the Aberdeen Fire Department, Chief Hubbard, Mayor and City Council in creating and funding this position helped to provide a focus specifically designed to bolster the Aberdeen Fire Department's Mission of:

- **Preventing harm;**
- **Protecting property;**
- **Fire prevention; and**
- **Emergency medical services.**





The central principal in any Community Risk Reduction program is “prevention”. Any strategy implemented to reduce risk helps to prevent future harm in the community, including loss of life; serious injury and burns to occupants; destruction of homes, structures, businesses and property; loss of livable housing units; wear-and-tear on fire engines, equipment and city water systems; and injury to firefighters.

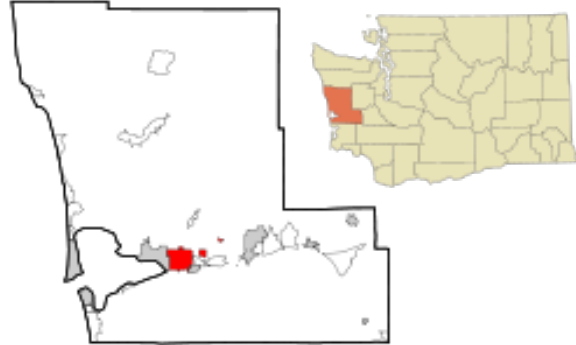
The best fire the Fire Department will ever have to fight is the one that never happens.



# COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION

The city of Aberdeen is located in Grays Harbor County in rural Washington State along the Pacific Coast; as such, the City has **12.58** square miles of land area and **1.71** square miles of water area- to include the Port of Grays Harbor which is a deep-water port with direct ocean access.

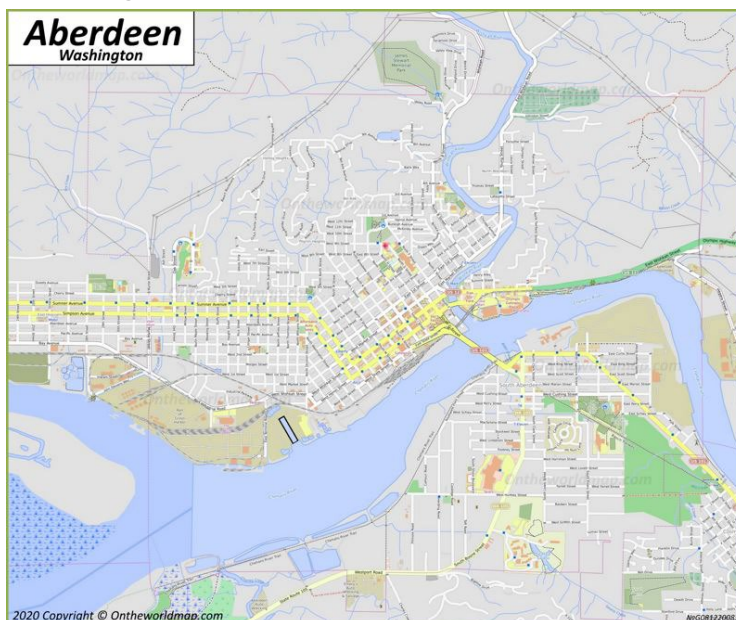
As of the 2020 Census, the population of Aberdeen was listed at **17,013** residents in **6,452** households.



The average occupancy is **2.53** persons per household with rental units consisting of **50.1%** of all housing. Population density averages **1,586** residents per square mile.

The median age in Aberdeen is **36.2** years- age **35.0** years for males, and **37.5** years of age for females.

The annual growth rate at **0.79%** in Aberdeen is significantly lower than the state average; the median household income is **46.4%** lower than average for residents in Washington state.



According to Census data, **18.1%** of residents (under the age of 65-years old) have a disability; **15.3%** of residents does not speak English as their primary language.

The poverty rate in Aberdeen is listed as **21.9%** which is **2.3** times higher than the average for Washington residents.





The Aberdeen Fire Department was founded in 1890 with all-volunteer firefighters. In January of 1908, AFD became a career fire department with paid staff.



Currently, the Fire Department directly serves a population of **17,013** residents in Aberdeen.

In addition, fire and EMS services are also provided under contract to the neighboring City of Cosmopolis, two surrounding rural fire districts and the Stafford Creek Correctional Center operated by the state Department of Corrections to the south of the city. In total, the Aberdeen Fire Department serves a total population estimated to be **22,548**.

In 2021, the Aberdeen Fire Department responded to **6,163** calls for service.

AFD currently is staffed with 36 full-time firefighters, as well as Chief Hubbard, Assistant Chief Golding, two administrative office staff and the Fire Services Specialist position.



The department operates from two fire stations, both of which were constructed in 1966, and have been in continuous operation since- with only minor upgrades or changes to accommodate new equipment and personnel. These stations house one ladder truck, two fire engines, a tele-squirt engine and four medic ambulances.



Both fire stations are staffed 24-hours a day/ 365 days per year with firefighters assigned to three shifts; each shift working 24-hours on-duty with 48-hours off-duty.



Off-duty personnel are relied upon to respond in for “second alarm” or “third alarm” structure fires where additional firefighters are needed at

the scene without delay, as well as to staff additional fire or emergency medical calls which come in while the rest of the firefighters are working the primary incident.

Due to the dual fire and emergency medical responsibilities of the Aberdeen Fire Department, all personnel are trained both as a firefighter as well as at a minimum level of Emergency Medical Technician. However, given the significant emergency medical call volume, approximately half of the Emergency Medical Technicians in the Fire Department are certified at the higher skill level of Paramedic.





# COMMUNITY **RISK** REDUCTION

This section of the report uses data from Aberdeen Fire Department incident records to create an assessment of community risks. This is generally reflected in the nature of the call or incident and how frequently these incidents occur, in relation to the risk created to the community for death, injury or destruction of property.

As reflected in the volume of incidents over the past several years, calls for service have increased significantly for the Aberdeen Fire Department. This data includes both fire and emergency medical calls with a sharp increase in incidents during the prior two years during the COVID-19 pandemic.

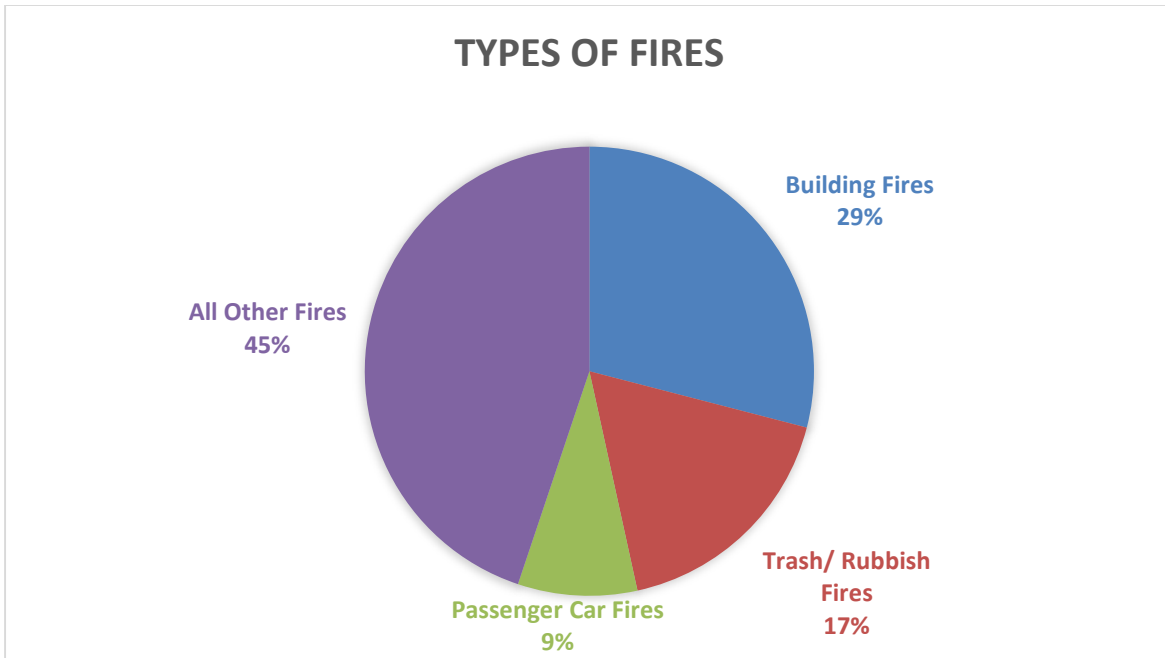


In conducting an assessment of calls for service related to fires, the most significant number of specifically identified incidents over the past five years were listed as:

- Building Fires
- Trash or Rubbish Fires
- Passenger Car Fires

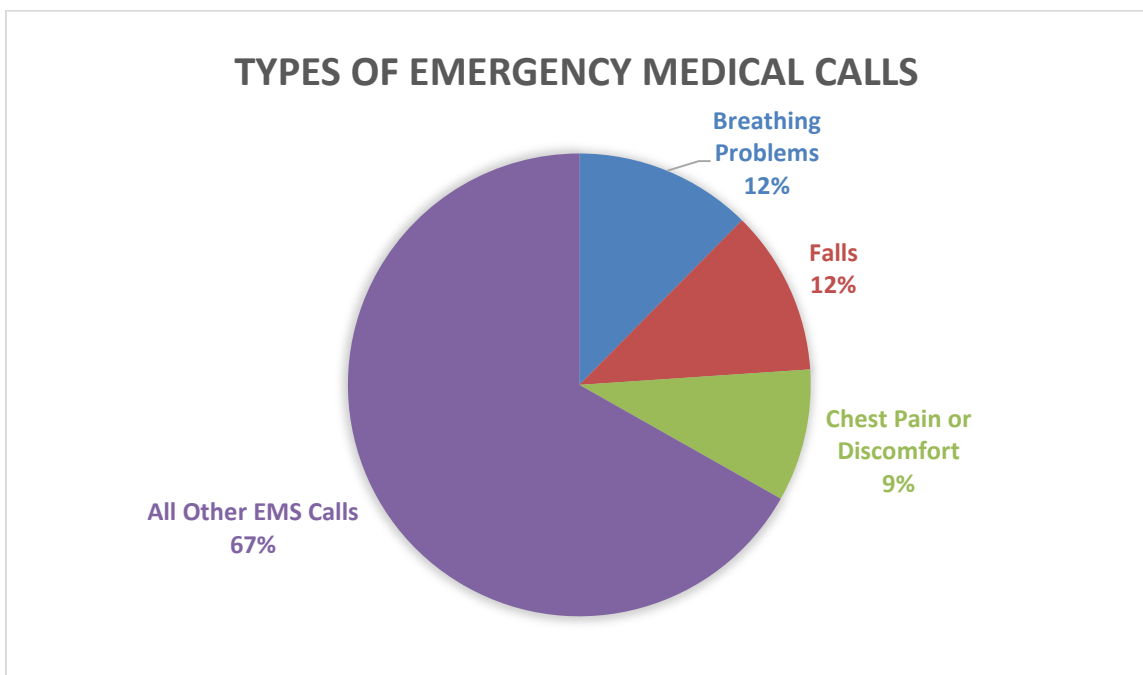
The three main fire-related incidents as listed above and illustrated in the chart below make up over half of all fire calls for the Aberdeen Fire Department:





In conducting an assessment of calls for service related to medical emergencies over the past three years, the three highest occurring incidents were listed as:

- Breathing Problems;
- Falls;
- Chest Pain or Discomfort.



# COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION

Over the years, the Aberdeen Fire Department has always made an effort to implement prevention strategies as part of the fire/ emergency medical services provided to the community, but this is dependent on when staff were available between call volumes and other day-to-day demands for service.

However, with the creation of the Fire Services Specialist position and direction provided by Chief Hubbard, the Fire Department was able to implement a formal Community Risk Reduction (CRR) program starting in Fall of 2020. Chief Hubbard had demonstrated his support of these formal prevention strategies because of the ability to save lives and property.

The following prevention strategies have been implemented by the Aberdeen Fire Department under the Community Risk Reduction Program:

- **SMOKE ALARM PROGRAM:** Starting in January 2021, the Fire Department partnered with the American Red Cross to provide and install 10-year lithium battery smoke alarms to anyone in the community who has a need or does not have a smoke alarm present in their home.

The American Red Cross provides the actual smoke alarm at no cost, with the Fire Department (often assisted by community volunteers) installing each smoke alarm and testing it for function. During these home visits, firefighters also provide basic fire safety information and tips to residents, to include creating a fire escape plan, family meeting place, identifying local hazards and other family emergency planning.



As firefighters come into contact with residents while present on a call for service, they conduct a quick check for working smoke alarms as well as potential trip and fall hazards in the home. If a smoke alarm is needed, regardless of the ability to pay, the Fire Department either installs a new





smoke alarm before leaving the scene, or makes a referral for follow-up and installation at a later time.

After a structure fire occurs, and as firefighters are available, the Fire Department attempts to conduct a neighborhood “smoke alarm sweep” door-to-door contact to inform residents of the danger of structure fires and make sure each residence has working smoke alarms on each level and in each bedroom of the home.

Fire has no economic or social boundaries and does not discriminate; therefore, it is a primary function of fire prevention to make sure all occupied residential structures have functional smoke alarms.

As of the date of this report, this program has provided and installed **155** smoke alarms within occupied homes in Aberdeen.



There has already been one documented “save” from a smoke alarm which had been installed in a bedroom in February 2021. The resident was awoken by the smoke alarm in his bedroom and then was able suppress the fire with a home fire extinguisher.

The resident was able to escape without injury; he credited the smoke alarm with saving his life.

As for fire prevention strategies, the installation of a \$25 smoke alarm has an amazing expense-to-benefit ratio because

the installation of this simple device can save lives, prevent injury and reduce property damage and destruction.

This prevention strategy of smoke alarm installations is directly focused on the risks created by structure fires and falls in the home.



- **FIRE EXTINGUISHER TRAINING:** The Aberdeen Fire Department has provided fire extinguisher training to residents and businesses over the years. Again, this program is dependent on firefighter staffing and availability between calls for service.

The Fire Department does have a homemade, gas-fed mechanical fire extinguisher prop which must be used outside to conduct the training. The unit is over 35-years old and does not meet current safety standards.

In 2021, the Aberdeen Fire Department submitted a federal grant to purchase a new, Lion BullEx digital fire extinguisher training prop which has a screen to simulate a fire and trains a person to properly use the extinguisher. The first grant request was not successful, but it has been resubmitted in the current 2022 grant period.



The Fire Department has conducted only a handful of these trainings, but there has been an increased interest from local businesses, including personnel working on the varied properties operated by the Port of Grays Harbor; it is hoped the new simulated training prop will make this program more effective.

This prevention strategy of fire extinguisher training is directly focused on the risks created by structure fires, trash & rubbish fires and car fires.

- **“FILE OF LIFE” MAGNETS:** The Aberdeen Fire Department partnered with Twin Star Credit Union to provide residents with a refrigerator magnet pouch to hold important list of prescriptions, medical information and emergency contacts. The Credit Union donated funds to purchase 1,000 of these magnets because during an emergency medical call, this simple and easy to locate pouch on the refrigerator provides the emergency medical technicians with critical life information; thus called the “file of life”.





These magnetic “file of life” pouches are distributed while on emergency medical calls, during smoke alarm installations, visits to the senior center, at Twin Star Credit Union branches in Aberdeen and during community outreach events, such as the Grays Harbor Emergency Expo.

This prevention strategy for “file of life” magnets directly focuses on the risks created by falls, problems breathing, chest pain and other emergency medical incidents.

- HIGH SCHOOL CPR, AED & FIRST AID TRAINING:** The Aberdeen Fire Department partnered with the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade health classes at Aberdeen High School and Harbor High to provide four days of CPR, AED and first aid training.

In the 2021-2022 school year, a total of **315** Aberdeen students were trained in CPR and first aid.

With financial support under a grant from the Grays Harbor Community Foundation, the Fire Department was able to purchase new CPR mannequins, AED’s and virtual-reality glasses for use in these high school sessions.



This prevention strategy for high school CPR, AED and first aid training directly focuses on the risks created by injuries from falls, problems breathing, chest pain and other emergency medical incidents.

- FALL PREVENTION PROGRAM:** As one of the most common emergency medical calls to the Aberdeen Fire Department, a robust fall prevention





program needs to be expanded; the Fire Department has partnered with the state Department of Health in a Fall Prevention pilot program, but implementation has been limited over the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At this time, while firefighters are out on calls for service, or conducting smoke alarm installations, they attempt to check the home for trip and fall hazards, especially with **17.9%** of Aberdeen residents over age 65.



This becomes a basis for educating occupants on how to mitigate risks in the home, such as power cords, rugs, items left on the floor, installing grab-bars in bathrooms, the impact of medications on balance, encouraging the use of



walkers and canes, as well as arranging for in-home care or assistance when necessary. The Fire Department also partners with several local social service and government programs, including Olympic Area Agency on Aging, Adult Protective Services, Grays Harbor Housing Authority, Aberdeen Senior Center and Coastal Community Action Program.

The rest of this program is currently covered under general Community Risk

Reduction public education visits, presentations and community events, but the Fire Department may expand upon on additional “fall prevention” strategies, as time allows.

This prevention strategy for fall prevention focuses on the risks created by injuries from falls.

- **FIRE SAFETY INSPECTIONS:** The Aberdeen Fire Department is tasked with conducting annual fire safety inspections of businesses and schools located in the city. This inspection is generally conducted by on-duty firefighters in between calls for service and other duties, but inspections of businesses



were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the exception of schools, daycares and new construction.

The Fire Marshal, who is the Assistant Fire Chief, is unable to conduct all of these inspections by himself. Unfortunately, with the high volume of calls for service and other day-to-day duties, firefighters have been very limited in the amount of time dedicated for fire safety inspections; in addition, when a call is dispatched, the firefighters conducting the inspection must leave and may not be able to promptly return.

The purpose of fire safety inspections is to identify, document and request the owner mitigate known or present fire hazards or dangers at a particular location, such as a business, apartment building, school or other public space. These inspections also provide up-to-date access and information for the Fire Department which promotes awareness of hazards which could be dangerous to responding firefighters.



This prevention strategy of conducting annual fire safety inspections focuses directly on the risks created by structure fires.

- **PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAM:** The Aberdeen Fire Department, following Community Risk Reduction principals, has initiated a general public education program to get-the-word-out to Aberdeen residents about fire safety and mitigating emergency medical events.



This program has included a variety of large and small efforts designed to keep safety and prevention in the forefront of what the Fire Department does and represents to the public we serve.



This has included rotating safety message banners posted at both fire stations, as well as presentations at local businesses, schools, scout organizations and the senior center (in addition to the programs listed above in this report under “Reduction”).



The Fire Department also participates in several community events, such as the Splash Festival, the Grays Harbor Emergency Expo and Founder’s Day festivities.

This sort of casual, one-on-one outreach between firefighters and Aberdeen residents allows for not only the distribution of informational brochures and resources (such as the “file of life” magnet), but also prompts conversations



regarding community needs; these outreach opportunities allow the Fire Department to share risk reduction strategies directly with residents—including the need for smoke alarms, family fire safety plans and fall prevention.

At each community event or outreach activity, the personnel present and materials provided are tailored to the nature of the event and anticipated audience.







The Fire Department has found public education efforts to be well received and appreciated in the community. Given staffing restrictions and call volume, most firefighters assigned to public education details are on overtime, with the exception of the Fire Services Specialist and any on-duty personnel who may be available to stop by.

This prevention strategy of ongoing public education efforts focuses directly on the top risks identified within this Community Risk Assessment of:

- Structure fires
- Trash and rubbish fires;
- Car fires;
- Breathing problems;
- Falls; and
- Chest pain or discomfort.

General public education efforts can also address many of the other risks associated with fires and emergency medical needs; education is a critical strategy of Community Risk Reduction.

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**The Final Word:** The support of the Fire Chief, Aberdeen Firefighters, Mayor, City Council Members and our public safety partners, has been instrumental in the creation and the ongoing support of Community Risk Reduction efforts by the Aberdeen Fire Department in the service of our community.

Every risk and prevention strategy outlined in this assessment goes directly to the heart of the Mission of the Aberdeen Fire Department:

*“To prevent harm to the public, and to protect property and the environment through fire suppression, fire prevention and emergency medical services 24-hours a day.”*

